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Foster Family Handbook

Third Edition

BRITISH COLUMBIA
Ministry for Children and Families

British Columbia Federation
of Foster Parent Associations

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Acknowledgments

Foster families in British Columbia, the B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations and the Ministry for Children and Families have enjoyed an excellent working relationship for many years. Together these groups represent a wealth of expertise on fostering, and we have used their contributions to help us put together this updated edition of the handbook. It has truly been a collaborative enterprise.

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Introduction

This handbook has been prepared in partnership by the Ministry for Children and Families and the B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations. It replaces *A Guide to Foster Care in British Columbia*.

The chief aim of the handbook is to explain how we work together to care for and help meet the needs of children who require foster family care. The Family Care Home program provides a framework for this work. Teamwork is a key method of helping children in care. It starts with planning for a placement of the child in your home and continues until after the child leaves.

The handbook provides essential information about the Family Care Home program:

- what is expected of you as a foster parent
- what support and assistance you can receive from the ministry to help you care for children
- how we work together to plan for and provide the best care possible for children

Much of fostering is guided by legislation, ministry policy and standards, but it is also guided by caring, compassion and common sense.

In this handbook, we have tried as much as possible to keep to plain, everyday language. Throughout the book we use the term *foster parent* to mean the same thing as *family care home parent*. The term *foster family* is also used, wherever possible, to recognize the contribution of all family members.

We hope you find this book useful in your work on behalf of the province's children.

1 • The Family Care Home Program

Defining the program

The Ministry for Children and Families is responsible for programs affecting children and their families in our province. Among the services the ministry provides are child protection, family support, and caring for children and youth unable to live with their parents.

Through its Family Care Home program, the ministry provides family-based care for children in care (under ministry care, custody or guardianship) as well as supports for foster parents. The ministry works closely with the B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations (BCFFPA) to create programs and services that work best for children in care and for the people who look after them.

Foster homes provide substitute parenting for children who cannot safely stay with their own families, whose families have asked for help with parenting during times of crisis, or whose families need specific or periodic help in caring for their children. In the foster home, the child receives:

- physical care such as clothing, food and shelter
- emotional care, including love and inclusion in a family
- nurturing of both intellectual and emotional development
- guidance and supervision
- positive role modelling

The Family Care Home program is based on four important ideas:

- *Professional volunteer parenting.* Foster parents are people with important skills and experience related to caring for children. Not everyone has the skills or personality needed to be a foster parent.
- *Inclusiveness and teamwork.* Foster parents, ministry staff, children in care and their parents, and other community helpers are all necessary partners in carrying out the program. The relationship among the partners isn't always easy, and each case is different, but teamwork is essential to the process of helping children.
- *Graduated levels of care.* Different children have different needs, ranging from reasonably straightforward to very complex. These needs can only be met by a range of foster parents with various levels of skill, and types of experience and training.
- *Child's Plan of Care.* The care for each child is based on a plan created by each child's service team, including the family care parent, which specifies who will be doing what, when it will occur and the expected change that is to happen.

The overall goal of the Family Care Home program is to provide family-based care for children which nurtures, heals, and develops their potential.

Role of the foster parent

As the person most involved with the child on a daily basis, you are a crucial member of the child's team. The Family Care Home program expects that foster parents follow these guidelines:

- *Remember that children in care have special needs.* Foster parents are sometimes advised to treat foster children the same way they treat their own. To a degree this makes sense, yet caring for someone else's child is not the same as caring for one's own. Many children in care have experienced traumatic separation and loss, as well as other difficulties. Most have a greater than average need for attention and affection, and may require more understanding and patience than parents are used to giving children.
- *Show personal interest in each child in your care.* There are many ways of doing this, including spending special time with the child, helping with homework or getting the child involved with community events or programs. The child should be encouraged to have fun, develop interests and learn appropriate social behaviour.
- *Respect each child's right to confidentiality.* Any information the child's social worker shares with you about the child must be held in confidence, unless there is a direct need—in the child's interest—to share this information. When in doubt about whether to share certain information with anyone, such as a school or social agency, discuss the matter with the child's social worker.
- *Remain open to new ideas on child development, parenting and fostering.* Fostering is a challenge and will almost certainly require you to learn new information, techniques and skills. You can improve your parenting skills by taking part in BCFFPA- or ministry-sponsored workshops and other community programs. The BCFFPA and your resource social worker can provide more information.
- *Maintain children's ties with their culture and extended family.* It is not always possible to find foster homes that can meet the particular needs of some children in care. For instance, aboriginal foster homes cannot always be found for aboriginal children in care. When they are placed in non-aboriginal homes, it is essential to maintain these important links to their extended family and aboriginal culture.

Ministry support

All services provided under the Family Care Home program must be consistent with provincial legislation, the most important of which is the *Child, Family and Community Service Act (CF&CS Act)*. Foster parents should be familiar with the act and must comply with it. (See References for a discussion of the sections most important for foster parents. Note especially **"Rights of Children in Care."**)

The act names "the director" as the official responsible for the program's services. The director is appointed by the minister and has overall responsibility for administering the act and the child welfare system. In practice, however, other ministry officials may be delegated (assigned) to provide service on a day-to-day basis. The people you will have closest contact with are:

- *The child's social worker.* Social workers are the ministry's main contact with children and families and make most of the key decisions for children in care. They are generally responsible for planning the child's care and for any funding issues directly related to the child. They share with you background information about the child and are available to answer your questions. If a child has special problems, their social worker helps you either personally or by referral to appropriate agencies or resources. They also work with the child's natural family. In most cases, the ministry "director" is the child's social worker.

- *Your resource social worker.* Just as every child in care has an assigned social worker, foster families have a resource social worker assigned to them. Resource social workers assist with your administrative and funding concerns, help resolve disputes or misunderstandings, give feedback on fostering methods and skills, help identify and secure needed training, answer questions about ministry policy and philosophy, and generally support you and your family.

These social workers are vital to foster parents. It is critical that you meet regularly with the social worker assigned to the child in your care—at the time of placement, throughout the child's stay in your home, and at any significant times during their care.

How children come into care

Three acts define how a child may come into care:

- The *Child, Family and Community Service Act* applies in two main situations:
  - when a parent is unable to look after a child and signs an agreement for care with the ministry; or
  - when a child is removed from a parent because the child needs protection.
- The *Family Relations Act* applies when a parent or guardian dies and no one is appointed by will to assume guardianship; or when the court orders the ministry director to assume guardianship. If relatives apply for custody and guardianship of a child under the *Family Relations Act*, a home study is completed before a final decision is made.
- The *Adoption Act* applies when a parent signs consents for a child to be adopted. Children may be placed in foster homes temporarily while the adoption process is being completed.

Legal status of children in care

The way that children come into care affects their legal status and some aspects of their care.

- *By agreement.* Parents remain the legal guardians. They must be involved in planning and must be asked for their consent in guardianship matters such as medical care, unless the negotiated agreement says otherwise. (**You are given a copy of this agreement.**) Since the aim is for the child to return home, you and the child's social worker must encourage the family to stay in touch through visits, letters and telephone calls.
- *Through removal.* The director has care and guardianship responsibilities. You can make decisions about day-to-day things like registering the child for school, but you must consult with the child's social worker about other issues. The plan is for the child to return home, so the court may allow the parents access to the child. The director normally consults with the parents regarding important decisions affecting the child.
- *Continuing care.* The child will not return to the family, so planning must address the long-term need for permanency and consistency. If the child is under 12 years of age, an adoptive home is usually considered. If the child is 12 or older, planning should address their eventual independence through placement with relatives, placement in the aboriginal community, adoption, or independence. In some cases, the court may approve continued contact between the child and the parents or guardians, despite the fact that the child will not be returning to their home. This provision recognizes the significance of the child's natural family, regardless of their ability to live together.

- *Children from other provinces.* Sometimes children who are in care in other provinces move to British Columbia. Generally, this province assumes responsibility for their care, while the other province retains guardianship. If an out-of-province child is placed with you, you should expect major decisions affecting their care to take longer than usual, because the child's social worker must consult with the guardian province.

Custody and guardianship

Who can make decisions and what decisions can be made when a child is in care varies considerably depending on how custody is set out in an agreement or a court order. Custody and guardianship do not mean the same thing.

- *Guardianship* includes all the rights and responsibilities of a parent, including making legal decisions about the child. This would include, for example, consent to medical care, to a driver's licence, to marriage or to out-of-country travel.
- *Custody* includes the day-to-day care of the child and includes some or all of the guardianship roles and rights of a parent.

In certain cases, the ministry director can authorize foster parents to carry out some of the director's duties regarding the care, custody or guardianship of a child. The foster parents would then care for the child as if they were the guardians, although legally they would not be. Such an authorization would be set out in the Family Care Home agreement (your contract with the ministry).

(For more information about children's legal status, see the chart "Guardianship Status and Implications for Foster Parents" in References.)

Types of Family Care Homes

There are five kinds of Family Care Homes: restricted, regular, and three levels of specialized homes. Each has its own type of Family Care Home agreement with the ministry.

- *Restricted* homes care for children known or related to the foster parents. The agreement is restricted to a specific child and ends when the child leaves the home or is no longer in care.
- *Regular* homes represent the greatest number of foster homes. Children placed in these homes are not usually known by the foster parents.
- *Specialized* homes (levels 1, 2 and 3) care for children with moderately to extremely challenging behavioural/emotional issues or significant developmental delay. Each level has specific approval, experience and training requirements, and separate service expectations.

All foster parents receive a per-diem (per day) payment for each day a child is placed with them. Specialized family care parents also receive a service payment that recognizes their extra responsibilities and service expectations and which also includes funds for monthly relief.

Types of care

Family Care Homes may provide one or more of the following:

- *Short-term or temporary care*. Most foster care is given while a solution is being found for the conditions that led to the placement of the child. The intent at the time of placement is to return the child to the family. Depending on the progress of the care plan, short-term or temporary care can be as short as one day but usually is not longer than 24 months.
- *Long-term care*. This is for a child who is in continuing care by court order, through the *Family Relations Act* (orphaned without a guardian) or under the terms of a Special Needs agreement (see the chart "Guardianship Status and Implications for Foster Parents" in References).
- *Emergency care*. The home takes the child with very little advance notice (same day or less than 24 hours). Placement might be during usual working hours or, for those homes that are willing, late in the evening. The home is generally used while another placement is researched and found. An emergency placement lasts up to 14 days.
- *Respite care* provides a short break for parents while the child is cared for in another home. These homes provide short-term care on an intermittent basis, taking children for a day or a few days at a time (for example, two days a week or four days a month). Note that a child is not legally "in care" in this situation. Respite is given to the child's parents as a family-support service,

governed by a Support Services agreement between the child's parents and the ministry. In these cases, the child's parents retain full custody and guardianship.

- *Relief care* is similar to respite, except that the break is provided for foster parents. (See "Relief to foster parents" in chapter 4.)

Agreements with the ministry

In British Columbia, all foster homes operate under a Family Care Home agreement. You sign the agreement after your home has been approved. **Only then can children be placed in your home.** Agreements are contracts and, as such, are legally binding on both the foster parent and the ministry.

Just as there are different types of Family Care Homes, there are different types of agreements under the Family Care Home program:

- *Restricted Family Care Home agreements* may be signed for up to one year and must be renewed each year. The maximum number of children per home is six, including the foster parent's own children.
- *Regular Family Care Home agreements* may be for up to three years. The maximum number of children per home is six, including the foster parent's own.

- *Specialized Family Care level 1 agreements* may be signed for up to three years. The maximum number of children per home is six, including the foster parent's own.
- *Specialized Family Care levels 2 and 3* agreements may be for up to 18 months. The maximum number of children **placed** in a home is three for level 2, and two for level 3. The maximum number of children in a home is six, including the foster parent's own.

  Agreements in levels 2 and 3 may be child-specific or bed-specific.
  - Child-specific agreements purchase one placement for a specific child. When the child leaves the home, the agreement is terminated, unless the plan is to use the bed for another child within 30 days of the discharge of the original child.
  - Bed-specific agreements can be made if a home is going to be used on a regular, ongoing basis, and not for a particular child.
- *Respite and Relief agreements* are used for short stays away from the child's regular home. Respite care provides the child with a brief, planned stay away from their family home and is arranged through a Support Services agreement. When Family Care Homes provide relief for other foster parents, the service is called "relief." (See also "Relief to foster parents" in chapter 4.)

2 • Teamwork and Planning

Importance of teamwork

The successful placement of a child in your home depends on several people working together. Foster parents, children's social workers, resource social workers, parents and the community all have important roles to play. It is essential to remember that the child is also entitled to be involved and consulted as much as possible.

To reach the goals set for the child's care, all the players must be involved in the planning and decision-making process. Planning is important because it focuses everyone involved on the issues, concerns and problems, and because it ensures that the child's needs are addressed in a way consistent with the *CF&CS Act*. Planning also helps to manage transition periods and to maintain continuity and consistency in the child's life and care.

Early on, the child's social worker, the child's family, you, your resource social worker and the child whenever possible will decide together who will deal with different aspects of planning for the child, as well as with specific situations such as contacts with schools.

The child's social worker has the key responsibility for planning for a child in care. However, your full participation in planning is also needed to establish a successful relationship with the child and the family. Early on, the child's social worker, the child's family, you, your resource social worker and the child whenever possible will decide together who will deal with different aspects of planning for the child, as well as with specific situations such as contacts with schools. Planning can save a great deal of confusion and frustration later on.

Children in care need to build positive relationships with their social worker and with the other members of the planning team. You can help this process by giving positive messages through your words and actions. It is also extremely important that you maintain regular contact with the child's social worker. Any proposed new activity or change in the child's life—such as community participation, vacations or a change of school—must be discussed with the social worker ahead of time.

The child's parents or family members will usually take part in planning. The more they can be involved, the more likely they are to be positive toward planning goals, work well with the other team members, and successfully maintain independence when the child returns home. Having a major say in the goals set for the child is the parents' right as well as a necessary, natural part of caring.

In most cases, foster children use local health resources, community agencies and public schools. Children who have special needs such as physical disabilities, developmental delay, or behavioural or emotional problems may require specialized services. People who supply these services then become part of the team working for and with the child and the family.

The pre-placement period

When selecting a foster family for a particular child, the social worker looks for a home that is most likely to serve the child's particular needs. The child's best interests are foremost in all decision making, as is required by the *CF&CS Act*. The child's interests must be considered before those of any person who wishes to care for the child.

If the child is aboriginal, their social worker must consider the importance of preserving his or her cultural identity, which is part of the child's best interests as spelled out in the act. Whenever possible, the social worker will arrange a pre-placement visit by the child to the foster home.

Background information

When a child is referred to your home, you **are entitled to all the known background information about them and their family relevant to the care of the child**. There is a form for this purpose; the child's social worker will give you a copy. If the child is in care of the director through agreement with the parents, you will also receive a copy of that agreement.

If the background information includes, for example, a child's history of making false allegations of abuse, their social worker tells you and includes this history in the planning document. The same is true if the parents or extended family are known to make false allegations or seek inappropriate contact with foster parents.

Keep in mind that you can say no to a placement, and you can discuss any concerns about a particular placement with your resource social worker.

If the child is not previously known to the ministry, the information may be limited. The "**Foster Parents' Pre-Placement Checklist**" lists questions you might want to ask the social worker if you need more information (see References).

It is essential, of course, that the confidentiality of information given to you about the child and their family be respected and protected. Other people, including other children living in your home, should be given only information that affects their safety and well-being or the safety and well-being of others. If you have any doubt about what information is confidential, speak to the child's social worker.

What to consider before accepting a child into your home

Foster families should be realistic when deciding whether a child would prosper in their family, and what supports or adjustments would be required. Your family should also recognize their strengths and limitations. For example, some families are good at fostering youths, while others do best with children who have particular types of interests or personality.

The pre-placement period is crucial to the success of the placement. This is the time for you to be open with yourselves, the child's social worker and your resource social worker about feelings and possible doubts regarding the proposed placement. The decision to accept a child should involve all members of your family. You will need sufficient time—particularly when there are special issues involved such as aboriginal, disability or family concerns—to consider the adjustments needed in your personal and family routines.

Keep in mind that you can say no to a placement, and you can discuss any concerns about a particular placement with your resource social worker. Such a discussion might lead to a decision not to place a particular child in your home, or it could mean that further planning is needed prior to such a placement. (See the Reference section for a list of questions you may want to ask.)

The child's Plan of Care

The child's social worker involves the foster parents and their resource social worker in the development of the Plan of Care. Every child who is in care for more than 30 days must have such a plan, which defines roles and goals over the long term. However, the plan is a living document, which is regularly reviewed and updated in response to changes in the child's needs and development.

A number of people are entitled to participate in the Plan of Care meeting:

- the child, if they are 12 or older, or if they are under 12 and want to participate
- a support person for the child, selected by her or him
- the child's social worker and the resource social worker
- the foster parent
- any foster family members who are directly involved in the child's care
- if applicable, a representative of the child's aboriginal community

Other people with information that will help in planning may also be invited to the meeting, or at least to that part of it that relates to their information.

The Plan of Care is intended to be comprehensive. It will include one of the following overall goals:

- return of the child to the natural parents
- placement with relatives
- placement within the child's aboriginal community
- "substitute care," meaning foster care or specialized residential care
- independent living for youths 17 to 19 years old, meaning living without in-home adult supervision (room and board, rental, shared accommodation)
- adoption

It will also contain plans for:

- placement of the child
- the child's emotional and developmental needs
- preserving the child's family and social relationships
- the child's health needs
- the child's educational needs
- the child's cultural heritage
- social and recreational opportunities
- religious heritage and activities
- any other matters of significance to the child

Even if the child does not attend the meeting, they are entitled to have the plan explained and to receive a copy. You receive a copy as well. You, the child's social worker and your resource social worker will discuss the plan and how it will be communicated to the child in your home. These discussions may include the family and the child when appropriate. The child's social worker keeps the child informed about all changes to the plan as they are made.

Caregiver's responsibilities

An important part of the Plan of Care is the caregiver's responsibilities section, which maps out how the child will be cared for in your home. It describes your role in achieving the objectives identified for the child in the Plan of Care.

The caregiver's responsibilities section is completed within the first 30 days of the child entering care and revised whenever there is any significant change in the child's circumstances, or when the original plan is no longer accurate. It is reviewed and revised by you, the child's social worker, your resource social worker and the other members of the planning team at least every six months, as part of the review of the Plan of Care.

Keeping records

Record keeping is an important part of your agreement with the ministry. Recording is essential because it:

- maintains a permanent record of the child's time in your home and in care
- helps with planning for the child
- helps in discussion with the child's social worker
- documents changes in behaviour over the period of time the child is in your home
- documents the child's experiences in your home, which can help them in later years to understand their time in care

Caregiver service records

Ideally, you should make daily entries about the child's progress and daily routines. As a minimum, you must record all significant events, and notify the child's social worker as soon as possible. Significant events include:

Keep a separate, confidential record for each child and store it somewhere private and secure.

- visits with natural family
- school-related issues
- health care issues
- unusual behaviour or behavioural changes
- positive achievements by the child
- changes in the child's circumstances or routines
- any incident or development that might put the child at risk of harm
- unauthorized absences from your home

Most caregiver service records are considered "documents" under the Family Care Home agreement and "records" under the *CF&CS Act*. As such, they are the property of the ministry and are handed over for storage and safekeeping at the end of a child's stay in your home.

Health Care Passport

Each child in care has a Health Care Passport in which you record all significant health information. This workbook will give you quick access to the child's health history and information. It is your responsibility to keep the passport up to date. (See "Medical and dental care" in chapter 3.)

The Life Book

A Life Book is an informal record of the people and events in the child's life while they are in your care. Life Books give children a sense of personal history and continuity.

Every child who is likely to remain in care for more than six months has a Life Book.

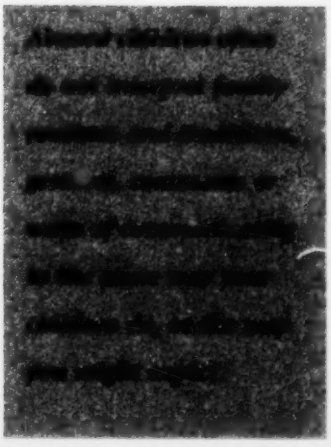
Every child who is likely to remain in care for more than six months has a Life Book. It is jointly maintained by the child's social worker, the child and you. You will usually look after the book. When a child leaves care, the Life Book is given to them.

These are some items that might be included in a child's Life Book:

- photographs
- souvenirs
- names, addresses and pictures of the foster family
- report cards
- certificates of achievement
- letters from friends and relatives
- souvenirs from trips, concerts, sporting events and so forth
- badges and ribbons
- school products or projects

3 • The Child in Your Home

Understanding the child



As experienced foster parents know, there are important differences between the experiences of children in care and those of their own children. One basic difference is the shock of separation the child is experiencing by living in a foster home. While children are individuals and will show the effects differently, we know that children removed from their homes go through aspects of the grieving process. We also know that all children in care have an attachment to their families, regardless of the situation that brought them into care. A child showing ambivalence and grieving in your home is normal and is not an indication that you are not doing a good job.

Another significant difference is seen when a child has been subject to physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Some children in care have experienced abuse, and a small number have abused other children as well. Because of their painful experiences, abused children often do not interpret family routines and traditions, gestures, comments or ways of communicating in the same way your children do, or the way you might expect. What might seem innocent and normal to a child brought up in a secure, loving environment—such as a hug, a joke, a light-hearted wrestling match—might be frightening and full of emotional significance to a child who has been abused.

This does not mean that you shouldn't include foster children in normal family activities. It means that you must be aware of the child's background as much as possible, and be sensitive to any signs of discomfort or fear. If these signals are ignored or missed, they can have serious consequences for the child, the foster family and the child's continued stay in your home. For example, a child or youth might suddenly show discomfort in your home, or loss of confidence in themselves or in you as a foster parent. This might also show up as anger or behaviour that seems out of proportion to the situation at hand. The child might interpret some action of yours as a repeat of adult behaviour they have experienced before, which might lead to allegations of inappropriate behaviour or sexual abuse.

It may be that no one except the child knows about the child's past abuse.

The child's social worker and your resource social worker can help you plan your care in a way that takes these issues into account. They should be discussed in developing the Plan of Care and included in the caregiver responsibilities section. The following are a few guidelines:

- Be conscious of your family's routines; behaviour can be misinterpreted by newcomers.
- Dress appropriately. What your family may be used to in terms of modesty, after bathing or before bed, may be interpreted differently by the child.
- Plan sleeping arrangements with care. For example, placing your teenager and a teen foster child of the opposite gender in adjoining bedrooms may not be a good idea.
- Be careful when helping with children's personal hygiene. Any touching you might interpret as normal, they might interpret as abusive or sexual.
- Be aware of any time spent alone with the child. Although special time for the child is a positive thing, it is possible for misunderstandings to arise about your intentions or motivations.

It may seem an impossible task to think about caring for and nurturing foster children while also being so cautious about how you relate to them. But it can be done.

- Try to look at your actions as if you were watching from outside. Are they rational and easily explained, and would they make sense if explained to someone else?
- Be very aware of children's reactions to you and your family. It may be that no one except the child knows about the child's past abuse. Don't assume they will interpret your behaviour in the way you intend.
- Establish a regular daily routine of checking on the child to ensure they are safe and feel secure.

What you should know about past abuse

If the child being placed in your home has been abused in the past, you need to know a number of details. This information can usually be obtained from the child's social worker. Knowing these facts will help you avoid unintentionally making the child uncomfortable or causing them to recall past abusive experiences:

- *Who was the abuser?* Was the abuser an adult or teenager? Male or female? Baby-sitter or friend?
- *Where did the abuse happen?* Did it take place in a particular room of the house? Outside the home?
- *When did the abuse happen?* Did it happen during bath time? At bedtime? During the night? When the abuser had been drinking?

- *What was the abuse?* Was the child physically, emotionally or sexually abused?
- *How was the child abused?* Were there threats or use of a weapon or implement? Did the abuser follow a particular routine?

Once you know about the child's experience with abuse, it is much easier to avoid replicating the circumstances the child associates with it.

Your relationship with the child's family

As foster parents, you are encouraged to maintain contact with the child's family when this is part of the child's Plan of Care. Dealing with issues of separation from their family is important for all children in care. There is a special legal importance when the parents continue to be the legal guardians.

The natural family includes the child's parents or guardians at the time they came into care. It also includes brothers, sisters and significant extended family members. The natural family is extremely important to the child. Regardless of how children come to be in foster care, most want to return home. You must demonstrate a positive and respectful attitude toward a child's family, while helping the child to be realistic about its strengths and weaknesses.

You must demonstrate a positive and respectful attitude toward a child's family, while helping the child to be realistic about its strengths and weaknesses.

The relationship between foster and natural families can take many forms. It can be close and cooperative, tense and strained, or anything in between. If you can maintain a close relationship with the natural family, you will find that the child is the main beneficiary.

If the relationship is neither strong nor positive, you may find it hard to understand the *CF&CS Act*'s emphasis on maintaining a continuing role for the natural family. As in any strained relationship, disagreements can easily become personal, and you may feel that the natural family is undermining or undoing all your good work.

There is no simple way to resolve these tensions. Understanding, empathy and discussion are the best tools you can use to build a more positive atmosphere. Try to understand the parents' feelings and how that might be influencing their behaviour toward you. These feelings may come out in a variety of ways—in anger, competitiveness, or criticism. Do your best to maintain a professional relationship, to model positive parenting of the child, to demonstrate good methods of dealing with children's behaviour and needs, and to communicate as honestly and supportively as you can.

Home visits

One of the best ways for children to maintain contact with their families is through home visits. Visits help children see their families realistically. Without contact, children may develop or hang on to exaggerated ideas about their families, whether positive or negative. Visits also reassure children that their families are still a part of their lives, and help them adjust to having two families now.

Visits help children see their families realistically.

Whether your relationship with particular families is positive or difficult, it is important for you to be sensitive to the children's changing emotional states, to their feelings toward family relationships and to the ongoing nature of their relationships with family and kin.

Before the child's visit, it is useful to talk to their social worker about the following:

- the location and length of the visit
- how food and gifts will be handled; most parents want to give material things to their children
- how to give the child and parents some privacy if visiting in the foster home

Some agreements (particularly those for specialized care, levels 2 and 3) specify that the foster parent will supervise visits between children and their families. In other situations, the child's social worker may ask a foster parent to play a particular role in visits.

In any circumstances in which there may be some risk to anyone involved in the visit—including the child or the foster parent—it is a good idea to discuss with the child's social worker who is to attend and supervise the visit. If possible, visits should be arranged for times that do not disrupt the regular activities of your family.

Rights of children in care

Children in care have special legal rights under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, such as the right to privacy and to be free from physical punishment (see Reference section for further details). These rights **must** be upheld. Although most foster families take the safety and security of their family for granted, children in care are more vulnerable and require certain guarantees to ensure they receive good parenting. The legal rights of children in care ensure certain basics of care are provided to them. Most foster families, looking at the rights of children in care from the perspective of ensuring a child's safety and well-being, will find that upholding these rights is not difficult.

If you have any questions about the rights of children in care, speak to the child's social worker. They are responsible for ensuring that the child understands their rights and that these rights are upheld, and they require your assistance in meeting this responsibility.

The following topics regarding care of the child are directly linked to the rights of children in care.

Discipline and positive parenting methods

Children in care have the right to know what standards of behaviour you expect of them, and the consequences of not meeting those standards.

The more that children are involved in discussing and setting the rules, limits and consequences that affect them, the sooner they will understand and accept the foster family's routines and expectations. Children who are able to establish a relationship of trust and respect (rather than follow rules through fear of punishment) are less likely to misbehave.

Discipline versus punishment

For your part, you should know and model the difference between discipline and punishment. Discipline teaches children how to develop self-control and be responsible for their own actions. Punishment, on the other hand, tells children in a painful way—and after the fact—that a bigger, stronger person doesn't like something they did. Punishment is a means of control.

Children in care need secure, stable and loving environments. Those who have been abused tend to regard physical punishment as a sign of rejection as well as anger. A great deal of research indicates that physical punishment of children is related to their later aggression toward others.

The *CF&CS Act* explicitly forbids the use of corporal punishment for any child in care. Corporal punishment means using physical force that may inflict pain, such as spanking, slapping or hitting. Other inappropriate punishments include but are not limited to:

The* CF&CS Act *explicitly forbids the use of corporal punishment for any child in care.

- depriving a child of basic rights or needs like food, clothing, shelter, bedding, or access to their parents or guardians
- denying visits, or phone or mail contacts, with family members not identified in the child's Plan of Care
- threats of removal from the foster home
- assignment of inappropriate or excessive exercise or work
- undue influence over the child's religious or personal beliefs
- physical punishment including shaking or forcefully pushing the child
- degrading actions including humiliation, ridicule or abuse
- group punishment for individual behaviour
- being punished by another child
- physical restraint, seclusion or confinement other than for the immediate safety of the child or another person, or as specified in the child's Plan of Care (created in consultation with, and supervised by, a professional person who is a recognized expert in child care)

Restraint is the act of intentionally restricting a child's ability to move. Any use of restraint with a child in your home must be reported to and discussed with the child's social worker and your resource social worker.

Appropriate discipline techniques include:

- talking through issues
- praising and encouraging
- modelling rules
- establishing clear and consistent expectations
- removing issue-related privileges
- allowing children to experience the logical consequences of their actions

You are encouraged to talk to the social workers about discipline techniques, training needs or any other issues relating to the care of the children in your home.

Privacy and personal possessions

Children in care are entitled to the same degree of privacy that reasonable parents would grant to their own children. The child's age, capacity and living arrangements are factors to consider in determining what is "reasonable."

Provided their **safety and well-being** are not endangered, children in care are entitled to:

- reasonable privacy in using the telephone
- reasonable privacy in using the bathroom
- receive mail unopened
- reasonable security and privacy in their personal belongings

The right to possess personal belongings means that children in care:

- should have appropriate luggage, along with a place to put it and their other belongings
- may refuse to share their belongings with others in the home
- may insist that others in the home treat their belongings with respect
- may take their belongings with them when they change placements or leave care

This right is subject to criminal law. It does not apply if a personal possession threatens the safety of the child or another person, or if receiving or possessing something (e.g. a weapon, a narcotic or stolen merchandise) is against the law. In such a case, **the foster parent notifies the child's social worker** who arranges for confiscation of such possessions and notifies the police when required.

If the foster parent has reason to suspect the child has possession of something contrary to criminal law, **the foster parent notifies the child's social worker** who may search the child's belongings. The child should always be present during the search unless waiting would place someone else's health or safety at risk.

Education

Children in care are expected to go to school, just as other children do. The Plan of Care will guide the degree to which you are responsible for making decisions about the child's education. When children are in care by agreement, their parents may keep the responsibility for making most decisions. Depending on the Plan of Care, you may be responsible for:

- enrolling the child in school
- telling the teacher that the child is in care, while respecting the confidentiality of information about the child
- signing report cards and going to parent-teacher meetings
- discussing learning and social problems with the teacher or counsellor
- encouraging the child to take part in extra-curricular activities (but not so often as to deprive the child of normal, relaxed family living)

If the placement has caused a change of schools, you should help the child as much as possible to adjust to the new school and new friends. You should also be on the lookout for school performance difficulties and other school-related problems, and alert the child's social worker so that the problem can be discussed and dealt with.

Staff from the school—including the classroom teacher, special education staff, principals and counsellors—are often part of the team planning for the child.

Funding and special arrangements

Normally, children in care will go to the local public schools. If there is a clear need or benefit to the child, the ministry may provide funds for private tutoring by qualified people. Only in unusual circumstances will the ministry authorize other educational plans, such as attendance at a private school or schooling a child through correspondence.

You pay for school supplies required by the school and for all school activities for which a fee is charged out of the family care rate. In exceptional circumstances, additional funding may be available through a "one-time-only" grant.

Funding may be available for continued education or training in university, college or vocational schools after the child is 16. In some cases, aboriginal children may be eligible for funding from their band or the federal government.

(See also "Payments to foster parents" in chapter 4.)

Religion and culture

While efforts are made to consider religion and culture when placing a child, often the child and the foster family have different religious beliefs or cultural practices.

For aboriginal children in care, it is essential that the specialized religious or cultural practices of their culture be considered in planning.

It is important that you and your family respect the religion and culture of any child in your care, and that you find ways of making that child feel comfortable in your home. At no time should you try to impose your own religious beliefs on the child.

With the growing diversity of cultures in our province, the need for respect and inclusion of all members of our society—regardless of culture, race, ethnic origin, language or ability—becomes more and more important. Foster care must mirror this spirit of inclusion.

For aboriginal children in care, it is essential that the specialized religious or cultural practices of their culture be considered in planning. Often no formal body of knowledge of aboriginal culture, traditional practices or local history exists. Opportunities to learn arise in informal family gatherings, in which important information is passed on orally.

To ensure that you are taking appropriate action, it is important to work with the child's social worker to develop a plan which addresses the child's needs for knowledge of, and participation in, special religious or cultural activities.

Medical and dental care

Each child in care has a Health Care Passport, a workbook in which you record all important health-related information about the child. The basics to remember about medical and dental issues are:

- Ask the child's social worker who is authorized to give consent for routine, special or emergency medical care.
- Advise the child's social worker if the child requires medical attention or treatment. (You should do this before treatment; if in special circumstances this is not possible, tell the social worker as soon as possible afterwards.)
- Immediately advise the child's social worker of any emergency medical needs of the child. The child's social worker can give you a number to call about medical emergencies (including authorization for treatment) outside office hours.
- Do not pay for any medical services (doctor, hospital, prescriptions and so forth) unless the child's social worker gives prior authorization.
- Do not involve any child in care in medical treatments or therapies that are not approved by a physician and authorized through the Medical Services Plan or Pharmacare. If you believe there are exceptional circumstances in which an alternative

therapy might be appropriate, you must receive approval from the child's social worker.

All children entering care and many children leaving care will have a medical examination. Check with the child's social worker to ensure that this has been done or scheduled. If not, you may ask them to make the necessary arrangements, or get permission to do so yourself. Children under age six should receive an annual checkup.

Legal status and medical care

At the time a child is placed in your home, find out who is authorized to give consent for routine and emergency medical care. Whether it is the parent or the child's social worker depends on both the child's legal status and the provisions of any agreement or court order.

For children in permanent custody or in care through the *Family Relations Act* or *Adoption Act*, you can arrange all routine medical services yourself. However, planned treatment or surgery usually needs to be authorized by the child's social worker.

A note about the Infants Act

Under the *Infants Act*, a child capable of making an independent and reasonable decision may consent to medical treatment without guardian or parental consent. Doctors must decide if the child has the ability to consent to their own medical treatment.

Even if a child is judged to have this ability, these decisions are often very difficult. In such cases, you should give children information and other support to help them make decisions that are in their best interests. Other people on the care team can also help the child with these decisions. Since you are often closest to the child on a day-by-day basis, you should alert others to help the child as appropriate.

Birth control and pregnancy

Instruction in birth control and planned parenting is to be provided for all adolescents in care. The child's social worker should discuss with you who will provide this instruction.

If a pregnancy occurs, inform the child's social worker so that immediate counselling can be arranged. Depending on the adolescent's legal status, the natural parents may be involved along with the adolescent and physician in assessing the options and creating a plan. (See also "Children in care with infants" in chapter 4.)

Dental care

Children in care require dental examinations every six months and receive basic dental care as required. Simply make an appointment and take the child to the dentist with the child's CareCard (medical card). Inform the child's social worker of any dental treatment, and record the information in the Health Care Passport.

Special dental care or orthodontic work requires special authorization. You should discuss this with the child's social worker before the initial referral to an orthodontist, so that they can apply for authorization.

Eye care

This should be discussed with the child's social worker. For an eye examination by an optometrist or ophthalmologist, all that is required is the child's personal health number. To fill an optical prescription, use the child's CareCard.

Other medical needs

For other special medical needs (prostheses, transportation, special diets and so forth), check with the child's social worker.

Transportation, travel and vacations

Transportation refers to getting around the community or area where the child lives. In an urban area, transportation might involve several different communities. In more remote communities, it may include only one.

Travel refers to trips outside the community or area where a child's normal activities take place. **Whenever plans are made for a child to travel out of the community, you must consult the child's social worker beforehand.** Travel outside the province or country requires written authorization from the ministry.

Most transportation guidelines apply to cars or public transportation, while travel also includes trips by train, overland bus or airplane. If a car is used, the following safety conditions apply:

- the driver must have a valid licence
- the car must be reliable and mechanically sound and safe
- the car must be maintained and operated in a safe manner
- whenever possible, children should sit in the middle seat in the rear of the car as front seats are more dangerous
- children must wear seatbelts or be seated in properly installed child car seats or carriers
- the car must be insured for at least one million dollars in third-party liability

Safety restraints

It is the law in British Columbia that all children must wear seat belts or be properly restrained in a carrier or seat. Infants under 9 kilos (20 pounds) must use a child-restraint seat, while toddlers 9 to 18 kilos (20 to 40 pounds) may use either a restraint seat or a lap belt. Lap belts should be used by children who are either more than 18 kilos (20 pounds) or over the age of six. Exceptions can be made for medical reasons, taxis and emergency vehicles.

Transport Canada has warned about hazards with passenger-side airbags. If you drive a vehicle equipped with a passenger-side airbag, no child under 12 years or under 45 kilos (100 pounds) should ride in the front passenger seat.

If you do not have an appropriate child restraint seat or seat belt, do not transport the child. The child's social worker can help you obtain the required seat or belt, and any training required to use the item correctly.

Transportation expenses

The child's share of regular family transportation costs is covered in the family care payment. If extraordinary transportation costs are part of the child's Plan of Care (for example, for frequent medical or educational trips outside the local area), discuss this with the child's social worker and your resource social worker.

Escorts or volunteer drivers

When foster parents cannot travel with the child, the child's social worker may arrange for a volunteer driver or escort and for reimbursement or payment of actual expenses. The child's capacity and abilities must be assessed if they are expected to travel alone.

Air travel

Occasionally it may be necessary for a child to travel by air. The ministry has policy to follow in such cases, so travel must be prearranged with the child's social worker. Talk to them about payment for the ticket, ticket pickup, transportation to and from the airport, and the travel schedule.

Letter of authority to travel out of province

A child in care must not travel out of the province unless their social worker issues a "permission to travel" letter, giving authority for the child to be outside the jurisdiction of British Columbia. The letter will state the child's legal name and status, and give authority for travelling. For children in care by agreement, written authority to travel must also be received from their parents or guardians.

Passports and visas for international travel

No child in care may travel out of the country without the approval of their social worker. For a child in care by agreement, the natural parent or guardian must apply for the passport (in practice, this may only mean signing the form). For a child who is permanently or temporarily in care, you may fill out the application. In either case, the social worker submits the application to the passport office, along with the necessary photos, child's birth certificate, letters of authority and money order.

Medical insurance

Foster parents or children's social workers arrange for additional medical coverage if a child is travelling outside the country. If you purchase the insurance at a travel agency or insurance company, discuss the possibility of reimbursement with the child's social worker and your resource social worker.

Vacations with the foster family

If you intend to take the child on a vacation out of the province, you must inform their social worker. Be sure to do so far enough in advance so that there is time to obtain any necessary authority, including the permission of the child's parents and the proper level of ministry authority.

Normally, the family care payment includes the child's share of family vacation costs. Financial assistance may be available for unusually expensive trips.

Summer camp

Registration in a summer camp must be authorized by the child's social worker and approved by the child's parents, if they retain guardianship. If the camp costs more than you can reasonably pay through the family care payment, the child's social worker may be able to arrange payment for camp fees and camping equipment. **Foster parents do not sign waivers of liability for negligence**.

Wilderness and other outdoor activities

Children in care may not participate in high-risk activities without the written authorization of their social worker and the consent of their guardians. You and the child's social worker must jointly make sure that any wilderness or other outdoor activities for foster children are organized and conducted safely. **Foster parents do not sign waivers of liability for negligence**. (See also the information on hunting under "Civil status, licences and legal matters" later in this chapter.)

The young person's finances

Among the most important goals for young people in preparing for their independence is to gain an understanding of money and have their financial affairs in order when they leave care. The following guidelines support these goals.

Allowances

Many children come into care with no experience of having money or savings. Spending allowances, no matter how small, are important to children both for themselves and as a way of learning about how money works in society. The monthly family care payment includes a spending allowance for the child. It is up to you to decide how much that allowance will be, and to discuss with the child how the money can be spent appropriately.

Earnings

Older youths in care sometimes have part- or full-time jobs, which can be a valuable help in preparing them for independence. If a young person in your care has a job and is living in your home, discuss with them and their social worker:

- how much of the earnings should be saved and to what purpose?
- if the youth is not going to school and not saving for a particular goal, will they contribute toward room and board? If so, how much?
- can the youth be financially independent, and if so, should they move into a place of their own?

Estates and trusts

Children sometimes have estates (inherited money or other assets) or money set aside for them by parents or other relatives in the form of trusts. The Public Trustee manages the estates and trusts of children who are permanently in care. The Public Trustee is referred to in law as the "guardian of the child's estate."

After discussion with the child and foster parent, the child's social worker may request that the Public Trustee release trust money for special items, education, or university tuition while the child is still under 19.

Most trusts or estates allow children to take control of their funds and assets when they reach 19, the age at which they legally become adults. Young people in care can assume control of their trusts by writing to the Public Trustee.

Trusts often give young adults access to more money than they are used to managing. Young people in care should be helped in planning for such money before it becomes available to them. Discuss this with the youth and their social worker.

Civil status, licences and legal matters

Many of the following matters will be particularly relevant and of interest to youths in care.

Marriage

Young people between the ages of 16 and 19 must have their guardians' consent to marry. Children under 16 must have a judge's consent to marry. For youths in care through agreement or temporary custody, consent must come from their parents. Youths in care through continuing custody orders must receive consent to marry from the director.

Youths who wish to marry must talk to their social workers. A young person's legal status changes after marriage. If youths are in care through the *CF&CS Act*, marriage automatically ends the jurisdiction of the act. If they are in care through the *Family Relations Act*, the social worker must bring the matter before the court.

The social worker may authorize a wedding gift of up to $50 for a young person who marries.

Enlistment in the armed forces

Youths 18 years old may enlist in the armed forces without their guardians' consent. Youths under 18 require this consent. Discuss the decision to enlist with the youth, and inform their social worker, so that authorization by the director can be obtained if necessary.

Birth certificates

The social worker can request a birth certificate on behalf of the child from the Vital Statistics division of the Ministry of Health. Requests for birth certificates are a priority if the child is registering in a recreational program or needs the certificate to acquire a proof of Indian status identity card.

Driving

If a youth in care wishes to apply for a driver's licence, their social worker and you should first discuss the matter with the youth and reach agreement that:

- the youth is mature and stable enough to become a safe driver if properly trained
- the youth is willing to take an approved driver's course

The youth's guardian must sign for the learner's and driver's licence. Youths who are employed may be required to help pay for the driver's education course.

Youths should take some responsibility in making arrangements, such as finding an appropriate course and obtaining necessary materials. Doing this may help confirm that the youth has sufficient maturity and initiative to assume the responsibility of driving.

Youths who do not live with a parent or guardian may make the application themselves, without the guardian's consent, if they sign a waiver confirming their independence. That provision would not apply to a child in a family care home. However, if a youth in care wants to buy a car, the guardian must first give approval.

The ministry will not contribute toward the cost of vehicle insurance. The youth is responsible for purchasing insurance with their savings or earnings. **If the youth is driving your car, appropriate ICBC liability coverage** (at least one million dollars) **should be obtained.**

Hunting and firearm licences for non-aboriginal children

Children in care must be 14 years old to hunt and must have passed a hunter safety training course, obtained a valid hunting licence and be accompanied by a responsible adult. Under the *Wildlife Act*, the accompanying adult must also hold a hunting licence and closely supervise the child.

Children in care by agreement or in temporary care must have written permission from their guardians to hunt, while those in continuing care must have their social workers' approval.

In British Columbia, people must be over 19 to apply for a licence to own a firearm. Youths in care who hunt generally use firearms owned by a foster parent or lent by a parent. **All firearms and ammunition in a foster home must be securely stored according to the rules of the firearms acquisition permit.**

Aboriginal right to harvest fish and game

Aboriginal people have an inherent right to harvest fish and game for traditional, ceremonial and food purposes.

There is a separate policy governing aboriginal children in care and hunting. Aboriginal people have an inherent right to harvest fish and game for traditional, ceremonial and food purposes. Hunting is part of aboriginal culture, and therefore aboriginal children have a right to receive guidance and encouragement in this area. The child's social worker must determine that the aboriginal child in care will be safe while participating in a hunt, and that:

- the child is accompanied by a responsible person exercising their inherent right to harvest fish or game or who holds a valid hunting or firearms licence
- the child expresses an interest in participating
- the child's participation is appropriate to their abilities and interests

Legal matters

Generally, children cannot be made parties to civil lawsuits. If, in unusual circumstances, a lawsuit is brought against a child in care, notify the child's social worker.

If a child is charged with a criminal offence by the police, or is to be interviewed, searched or interrogated by the police, immediately notify the social worker who will either be present during the police action or will arrange for a guardian/parent to be present.

Damages caused by a foster child

The ministry does not accept liability for damages caused by a child in care. This is based on the principle in common law that a parent or guardian is not responsible for the actions of a minor unless the parent can be proven to have acted negligently.

If a child in your care damages your property, notify their social worker and your resource social worker. You should also phone the BCFFPA provincial office at **(604) 660-7696** or toll-free **1-800-663-9999** as they can help you determine if the BCFFPA-administered foster parent insurance applies. (See also "Household and tenant insurance" in chapter 4.)

You should phone the BCFFPA provincial office at (604) 660-7696 or toll-free 1-800-663-9999 as they can help you determine if the BCFFPA-administered foster parent insurance applies.

A safe home

It is important that you give special consideration to the safety of your home in relation to the capabilities of the children placed with you. **Arrange to review the safe storage of medication, poisons and other potentially dangerous items or goods with the child's social worker.** Children need to be made aware of known hazards in their home, garden and neighbourhood as they will not be aware of potential danger which you or your family may take for granted. For the same reason, children need to understand what to do in an emergency.

The Federation of B.C. Youth in Care Networks

Growing up in care can lead to experiences not shared by children who grow up with their own families. Because their problems are different, children in care may feel isolated, powerless and voiceless, and may benefit from the friendship and support of others who have been through the system and know what it's like.

The Federation of B.C. Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN) is a provincial organization formed by and for young people in care and made up of many local groups throughout the province. Networking gives members an opportunity to establish and maintain contact with other young people in care, exchange ideas, share common problems and explore options.

It also gives them a collective voice to address issues at the provincial level. The networks work with government and service providers to help improve conditions for young people in care by promoting their views and concerns.

Anyone between the ages of 14 and 24 who is, or has been, in care can join. Ask the child's social worker how to get in touch with your local network. Or call the FBCYICN for more information. If you're in Vancouver, phone **527-7762**; from elsewhere in B.C. call toll-free **1-800-565-8055**.

When the child leaves your home

There are many reasons why a child might leave a foster home. They include:

- *Achievement of care plan goals.* These departures are planned well in advance, with the participation of all interested parties—children, foster family, natural family and social worker.
- *Change in foster family circumstances.* Many things can happen that affect a family's ability to foster. Examples are serious illness or death, divorce or separation, or a transfer out of the community. The child, the foster parent and the child's social worker should all be involved in planning the move to another home.
- *Request by foster family.* If a placement proves too difficult, you may ask the social worker to move the child. The Family Care Home agreement requires a 30-day notice in order to arrange alternative care for the child.
- *Request by child in care.* Children sometimes ask to be moved to another home, or run away from a foster family and refuse to go back. The child's social worker discusses the situation with the child and you before deciding what should be done.
- *Request by ministry.* A child may be moved for a variety of reasons, from concerns about the foster family to the preference for placing brothers and sisters together. If there are protection or safety concerns, the child may be moved with very little notice.

- *Court order.* The family court may order a child to be returned home—for example, in cases where a child was removed from their home and temporarily placed pending a court decision.

Other moves may simply be due to youths reaching the age of majority (19) or proving themselves mature enough for independent living with some degree of supervision by a social worker. Sometimes, a move may come because the child has been adopted, because the youth has been accepted into the armed forces, or because the child must move to attend school or maintain a job.

Easing the transition for the child

Cooperate with the child's social worker to make the transition as easy as possible for the child. Mainly, try to support the social worker's explanation to the child, and help the child prepare their belongings for the move. The social worker might discuss with the child the possibility of future visits from or to you.

If the child is returning home or being adopted, you can help most by reassuring them about the move and advising the social worker if there appear to be any problems.

If the move is to another placement or another resource such as a group home, it will be necessary to discuss the reasons for the move with the child. Sometimes it is possible to resolve any differences and keep the child in your home by further discussion with the child and their social worker; at other times your job will simply be to reassure the child about what is to come.

Easing the transition for the foster parents

Developing caring feelings toward children who stay with you is natural.

How foster families feel when children leave their homes can range from strong relief to profound loss—and sometimes a mix of positive and negative emotions. You may regret having become emotionally involved with the child, or feel guilty that you didn't "do enough" for them.

Developing caring feelings toward children who stay with you is natural. It is not helpful to worry about that aspect of fostering. Remember that foster parenting is a temporary activity. Success often means that the child will move on from your home. A big part of foster care is learning to let go. Discuss your feelings with your resource social worker or local Foster Parent Association contact person.

Families may need time to adjust. It is sometimes wise not to take new children immediately into your home just because there is a vacancy. Only after you have accepted the loss or transition should you decide when or whether to continue fostering.

4 • Supports and Entitlements of Foster Parents

Payments to foster parents

Foster parents receive payments at rates developed to reflect the actual costs of caring for children. The rates are updated from time to time, and you will be informed when that happens. Current family care rates can be obtained from the local Ministry for Children and Families office.

Cheques for family care homes are issued by the ministry by the 15th of each following month. This means, for example, that if a child was fostered in the month of August, the cheque for that period will arrive close to the middle of September.

Lost cheques

If a cheque is lost or stolen, report this to your resource social worker. In order to receive a replacement cheque, you will be given a "letter of undertaking" to complete. This is a legal declaration that a cheque is lost or stolen and is a requirement before the ministry is permitted to issue a replacement cheque.

Basic family care rate

The family care rate covers the regular ongoing costs of raising a child. You are expected to budget the family care payment over the year and across placements. Besides food and shelter, the rate reimburses you for the following:

- *School costs.* Except in unusual circumstances, school-related costs are to be paid from the family care rate. This does not include post-secondary education costs.
- *Babysitting and relief.* This includes the routine costs of care for natural and foster children during your absence due to child-in-care related business (for example, school meetings, child conferences, Foster Parent Association meetings).
- *Vacation expenses.* This includes the foster child's share of normal expenses for vacations and summer camps. You will need to budget for these items. If the cost of a camp exceeds your per-diem payment, assistance may be possible.
- *Routine wear and tear.* The shelter portion of the family care rate covers routine wear and tear related to additional children in the household. (For damages caused by the child in excess of routine wear and tear, see "Household and tenant insurance" later in this chapter.)

The family care rate covers the regular ongoing costs of raising a child.

Start-up expenses

You may need some money at the beginning of a placement to cover food and household expenses until your first cheque arrives. In this case, you can request an advance, which, if granted, will be deducted from the first month's family care payment.

If necessary, you can request a grant from the child's social worker to bring the child's clothing up to standard. Except for costs covered by this type of annual clothing grant, all clothing is budgeted from the monthly payment.

Payment may also be authorized for some extraordinary items necessary for the child's care. Such items depend very much on the particular child and their circumstances but might include, for example, specialized furniture or a bicycle. These costs are not deducted from the first payment. Remember that items paid for in this way belong to the ministry.

You should not end up out of pocket as a result of your work as a foster parent.

With the exception of the child's clothing needs, all of these start-up expenses should be discussed with your resource social worker.

Payments for supplementary supports

You should not end up out of pocket as a result of your work as a foster parent. Supplementary supports are available when the service requirements of the child in care are beyond regular expectations. Speak to your resource social worker about help with additional costs.

One-time-only payments

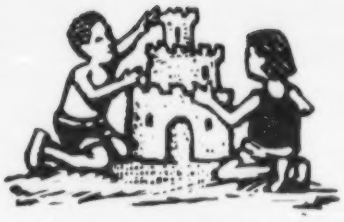
These payments can be for single or ongoing expenditures, but they cannot be paid on an ongoing basis. Payment can be made to you or to the person or agency supplying the service. One-time-only payments are considered on a case-by-case basis. Situations that might be covered include:

- exceptional transportation costs such as accompanying a child to another city for medical or family reasons
- exceptional medical requirements such as special equipment not covered by the Medical Services Plan or ministry health services
- exceptional clothing needs such as work clothing or specialized athletic wear
- insurance-deductible reimbursement for damages by the child in care

Your resource social worker assesses the request, ensuring that the item is part of the plan for the child and that it is reasonable to ask for additional funds to meet the expenditure.

Guardianship expenses

While most costs for children in care are covered by the family care rate, there are some important exceptions. Referred to as guardianship expenses, they include items such as:



- clothing
- psychological and professional services
- post-secondary education or private schools
- transportation of the child's parents or relatives to visit the child
- medical transportation
- incidental expenses (for example, tutors, driving lessons, some travel costs, small gifts)

The child's social worker is responsible for assessing the need for guardianship expenditures, in discussion with other members of the planning team.

Children in care with infants

When a child in care with an infant lives with a foster family, a number of matters should be discussed by the family and the social worker beforehand. The child in care will be expected to parent the baby, with some support from you.

You are not expected to cover the infant's costs. The child's social worker will arrange to meet the baby's needs, usually through payment to the mother. You will need to be a party to any agreement about costs and living arrangements if the mother and infant are to remain in your home. In some cases, the infant may be placed in the care of the director, and family care payment procedures will then be applied.

Professional support services

Occasionally, a child may need to be placed with foster parents who do not have the experience, time or skills to deal with the child's full range of needs. A particular Plan of Care may also require a commitment from the caregivers that goes beyond the service expectations of their contract. In these circumstances, the social worker may authorize purchased home supports.

Home-support services may also be authorized for short-term and emergency situations to support or provide relief for the foster parent. In exceptional cases, this service may continue as a support to the home.

Homemaker services

Occasionally, you may need to be away from home temporarily for reasons such as dealing with family crises, taking part in training courses, attending court hearings or taking a break from caring for children with extraordinary needs. In such cases, extra funding may be available for baby-sitters or temporary homemaker services.

Child care

Normally, pre-schoolers remain with you during the day, except when they attend pre-school programs. However, child-care subsidies are available if child care is part of a child's Plan of Care. Talk to your resource social worker.

Wherever possible, these children are placed in licensed child-care facilities. If none are available and licence-not-required family child care is to be used, the social worker and you are responsible for screening and monitoring the facility.

Supported child care (previously called special needs day care) is a special program you can use if you are caring for children with disabilities.

A child and youth care worker may be assigned to help you meet service expectations that are beyond the skills or service expectations of your home.

Infant development services

This in-home service may be used, when available, to help stimulate the development of children up to three years of age who are developmentally delayed or disabled. In some regions, infant development services may include parent support groups.

Child and youth care worker services

A child and youth care worker may be provided to a child in your home when:

- the child is in care for a short time, and the service is part of an ongoing support offered to the child's family
- the service is preparing a youth in care for transition to independent living
- the child has developmental delays, which the child and youth care worker is assigned to work on

In other situations, a child and youth care worker may be assigned to help you meet service expectations that are beyond the skills or service expectations of your home.

Community resources

Besides the services provided by the Family Care Home program, many community resources that help families are available. Ask your resource social worker for help in finding these, or check the local telephone directory. Resources include:

- local Foster Parent Associations or the BCFFPA Fosterline **1-800-663-9999** (9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday to Friday)
- community or regional district recreation centres and programs (sports, hobbies, social contacts)
- mental health services (family counselling, psychological assessments)
- public health services and facilities (speech and hearing assessments, child health consultations, family counselling)
- child development services (pre-school programs; infant stimulation programs; speech, physio- and occupational therapies)
- B.C. Council for the Family (counselling and family activities)
- school district special services (counselling, psychological testing, tutoring)
- churches (child and family programs, including summer camps)
- family centres (parent and child drop-in centres, family places)
- Native Friendship Centres

Urgent consultation service

- Call the child's social worker and/or your resource social worker between 8:30 to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday.
- Outside office hours, call the Foster Families Support Line at **1-888-495-4440** between 4:00 p.m. and 12:45 a.m., Monday to Friday, and between 8:00 a.m. and 12:45 a.m. on statutory holidays and weekends.
- Call the BCFFPA Fosterline **1-800-663-9999** between 9:00 and 4:00 p.m., Monday to Friday.
- Call your BCFFPA Regional Coordinator (you can get their name and number from the Fosterline).

The Foster Families Support Line provides professional support, information and consultation and a fast response for urgent issues outside regular office hours.

Relief to foster parents

Both *relief* and *respite* mean a short break away from caregiving duties, but the ministry makes an important distinction between the two terms:

Relief means both in-home and out-of-home relief for a foster parent. (*Respite* is out-of-home care provided or funded by the ministry as a service to a child's parents with whom there is a Support Services agreement.) All types of Family Care Homes may provide respite or relief services.

Arranging relief

You are expected to find appropriate relief caregivers when you need a break. Relief is normally given in your home, since that involves the least disruption to the children. Since you are responsible for ensuring the suitability of any person entrusted with the care of the child in your home, usually you will use an approved foster parent. Local Foster Parent Associations often maintain rosters of approved homes that are available for relief.

Since you are responsible for ensuring the suitability of any person entrusted with the care of the child in your home, usually you will use an approved foster parent.

However, sometimes it may be better for a child in care to stay temporarily with people who are not approved family care parents but perhaps relatives of yours or adults already known to the child, such as in-home relief providers. Discuss any plan to use relief caregivers who are not approved foster parents with the child's social worker and your resource social worker.

People who provide relief must:

- be at least 19 years old
- satisfy the child's social worker and your resource social worker that they can ensure the safety and well-being of the child
- possess the maturity, knowledge, skill and ability to meet the child's needs and follow through with daily routines
- use positive behaviour management techniques and appropriate discipline (and agree not to use physical punishment or other prohibited methods of discipline or behaviour management)
- be present and in charge during all hours that relief is required
- know what to do in an emergency
- have no criminal record which would affect the child's care, safety or well-being

Any plan to use relief caregivers who are not approved foster parents must be discussed with the child's social worker and your resource social worker.

If you have difficulty arranging relief, talk to your resource social worker.

Overnight relief

Consult the child's social worker about any plans to leave the child in overnight care with a relief foster parent, including an approved family care parent. The social worker must approve any overnight care with a relief foster parent lasting over 14 days. If the relief caregiver is not an approved foster parent, the child's social worker will request a resource social worker to assess and approve the relief foster home before permitting the child to stay there.

Relief for levels 1, 2 or 3 homes

Relief is an important component for both the child and the foster parent in most specialized family care placements. You are expected to plan and arrange for periodic relief on a schedule that best meets both your own and the child's needs.

Supplementary relief

Ask the social worker to approve supplementary relief payments for either in-home or out-of-home relief in situations in which:

- you need more than three days of relief each month to maintain the placement, and
- the cost would require you to spend an unreasonable proportion of the service payment

Babysitting

The payment you receive for each child's care includes an amount for babysitting. Anyone who babysits for you must:

- satisfy the child's social worker and your resource social worker that they can ensure the safety and well-being of the child
- possess the maturity, knowledge, skill and ability to meet the child's needs and follow through with child-caring routines while they are babysitting
- use positive behaviour management techniques and appropriate discipline (and agree not to use physical punishment or other prohibited methods of discipline or behaviour management)
- be present and in charge for the babysitting period
- know what to do in an emergency

You are still responsible for the care of the child, even when you hire a babysitter. Give the babysitter a phone number where they can reach you, in case there is a concern they need to discuss with you.

Taking care of yourself

Taking care of a foster child in your home is a demanding job. No matter what joys or stresses it brings to you and your household, it will certainly change your day-to-day routines and experiences. We want children in care to live in healthy, functional families. You must make sure that you take care of your own and your family's needs as well as those of the children placed with you.

What does taking care of your own needs mean? It means behaving in a way that is caring, nurturing and inclusive to the child living in your home. In addition, it means:

- knowing your own and your family's limits
- taking advantage of supports that are offered to you
- making use of the informal supports available to you (family, friends and so forth)
- linking with other foster parents in your community to share information and support
- knowing what you and your family need in order to keep on an even keel
- sharing accomplishments, satisfactions and responsibilities with other family members
- working constructively and cooperatively with the other members of the child's support team, including the child's social worker, your resource social worker, the child, the child's family and other involved professionals or helpers

B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations

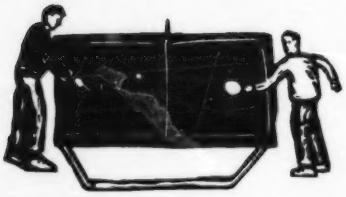
The ministry encourages all approved foster parents to become members of the BCFFPA. It is an organization run by foster parents, whose aim is to support its members in their work as caregivers. Its active links with the ministry make for stronger working relationships between foster families and social workers. The federation has a local, regional and provincial structure not unlike the structure of the ministry.

Local associations

Local associations are made up of foster families in a particular community. A resource social worker acts as a liaison between the ministry and the local group. Each local association elects officers, holds regular meetings and sends two representatives to the regional council meetings. At present, there are 70 local Foster Parent Associations in the province. Local associations can be a most valuable resource for foster families, providing services such as:

- assisting the ministry with recruitment and orientation of new foster parents
- providing education and training for foster parents, including discussion groups and workshops
- supporting foster families with "buddy systems" and self-help groups
- organizing social activities for foster families, such as Christmas parties and summer picnics
- working in partnership with ministry staff on special programs or projects

If you live in an isolated community that doesn't have a local association, it may be possible to create a small group to share and exchange fostering news and ideas. Funding is available to help pay for operating costs and for support and training events. Ask your resource social worker how to set up an association, or call the BCFFPA directly (in the Vancouver area, call **660-7696**; elsewhere in the province, call toll-free **1-800-663-9999**).



Support in resolving foster care concerns

The BCFFPA also acts as an advocate for foster parents. Even if you do not belong, you can ask the association for help in sorting out difficult situations. The BCFFPA and the ministry have worked out agreements for resolving conflicts (see "Review, resolution of conflict, and closure" later in this chapter).

Emergencies

You must notify the ministry immediately of any emergencies that seriously affect children in care. Such emergencies include medical crises, accidents, runaways, arrests for juvenile crimes, and death. Always share important information with the child's social worker, but remember that emergency situations require an immediate response.

Call the local district office to reach the child's social worker. If the social worker is not available, talk to the intake worker or the worker's immediate supervisor.

When an emergency happens outside office hours (normal hours for ministry offices are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday), phone the ministry's After Hours Line:

- In Vancouver, the North Shore and Richmond, call **660-4927**.
- In the Lower Mainland from Burnaby and Delta in the west to Maple Ridge and Langley in the east (all within the Vancouver free-calling area), call **660-8180**.
- For the rest of the province, call toll-free at **1-800-663-9122**.

For other emergency phone numbers see the Quick References section.

Child missing, lost or absent

You are allowed and encouraged to use common sense about which situations are emergencies and which require immediate notification of the child's social worker. The Plan of Care and the caregiver responsibilities section should address your role in emergency situations. If a child is missing, lost or absent from your home without permission, notify their social worker. You may use some judgment in when to do this, but the child's social worker must always be notified, either immediately or within a short but reasonable time.

Ministry policy outlines some situations in which there is no discretion about notifying the child's social worker. Immediate notification is necessary if the child:

- is under 12
- has an acute physical or psychological condition
- has a limited capacity for making responsible decisions, caring for themselves, or understanding the consequences of their actions
- would not normally run away or go missing
- has a history of associating with people or places that have put the child at risk of harm

After receiving your call, the child's social worker will follow up with the police, and will usually take responsibility for informing the parents if the child is in temporary care or in care by agreement. To avoid confusion, you and the child's social worker should agree on this at the time of placement.

Normally, family care payments are suspended if the child is absent for more than 14 days. However, if you have any expenses related to the child during the absence, these costs may be reimbursed.

When a foster parent or foster family member is injured

If you or a family member is physically or psychologically injured because of an assault by a child in care or a member of the child's family, notify the ministry as soon as possible. The ministry will assign a social worker to assist your family in dealing with the incident.

Review, conflict resolution, and closure

Monitoring and review

The child's social worker makes regular visits to assess the child's progress toward Plan of Care goals and to monitor their safety and well-being. **The child's social worker is required to speak with the child privately at least every three months.**

Annual reviews

All Family Care Homes are reviewed once a year by the resource social worker. This review occurs within 30 working days of the anniversary of approval and includes a file review and a home visit. Both family care parents are interviewed, and there may be joint discussion of issues such as the social worker–foster parent partnership, significant changes regarding the child or children placed in your home, any significant changes in your home, and any skills or knowledge that require strengthening.

During these reviews, all children placed in your home who are able to communicate are interviewed alone and apart. Children who cannot communicate must be seen by the social worker.

Resolving issues between staff and foster parents

Regular contact between children's social workers, resource social workers and foster parents help to minimize and clear up most matters of dispute.

When there is a serious dispute between a foster parent and a staff member of the ministry, the BCFFPA and the ministry have an agreement on how to seek a solution. The agreement, titled "Resolving Differences between Ministry for Children and Families Staff and Foster Parents," (see References) helps resolve most disputes quickly and at the local level, and also ensures that foster parents receive any support and assistance they need during conflict resolution.

Not all disputes need to or should use these formalized procedures. Regular contact between children's social workers, resource social workers and foster parents help to minimize and clear up most matters of dispute. When disputes arise, all parties should use a collaborative approach while working toward resolution. Examples of matters that can and should be discussed with the social workers include:

- service plan decisions
- access to the child in care by natural family members
- medical care
- the child's education
- discipline practices
- placement or the move of a child to another resource
- closure of a foster home

If you cannot resolve the matter informally, the BCFFPA/ministry agreement outlines stages that resolution can take. This process begins with meetings between you, the child's social worker and your resource social worker. You can contact the BCFFPA to help you with the process, which may involve discussions with the social workers' team leaders, supervisors or other managers.

Should resolution not be achieved within the regional management structure, you can write to the BCFFPA with the following information:

- the child's name and birth date, and how long they have been in your home
- details of the issue and efforts made to resolve it
- your authorization of the federation's involvement

After reviewing the material, the federation may ask the ministry to review your concerns. Within a month, the ministry will send a registered letter explaining the decision to you. This decision is final.

External review

There are times when it is preferable to have someone not involved in the matter seek a solution. You should consult with the BCFFPA about other options if the BCFFPA/ministry agreement is not satisfactory. The right to an external review of government decisions has been strengthened in the last several years. External review processes for the Ministry for Children and Families are under review at the time of this writing. Government organizations or bodies with a role to play include:

- The *Children's Commission* is empowered to review anyone's concern that a child's rights under section 70 of the act have been breached.
- The *Child, Youth and Family Advocate,* who is empowered through separate legislation to advocate for the interests of children in the province. In relation to the *CF&CS Act,* the advocate has broad powers to:
  - protect and advance the rights of children and youth
  - ensure that the views of children and youth are heard and considered
  - ensure that complaint and review processes are fair
  - provide information and advice to government and the community
  - promote and coordinate advocacy services for children and youth
- The *Ombudsman* can be asked to review any matter of "administrative fairness." The Ombudsman's job is to receive inquiries and investigate complaints from people who believe that a public authority has been unfair.

Allegations of abuse

The BCFFPA and the ministry have a separate protocol for dealing with allegations of abuse of a child in a foster home (see Reference section). If such a situation arises in your home, the resource social worker will give you a copy of the protocol and explain the process for dealing with the allegation.

Closure of Family Care Homes

If the ministry decides to close a home, the foster family must be told why. Once the reasons have been communicated in person, a letter confirming the reasons must be sent. If the foster parents do not agree with the closure, they may wish to pursue the matter using the BCFFPA/ministry agreement.

When children are removed from Family Care Homes, support services are available to the foster parents and children in care to minimize disruption and separation grief. The foster parents are assisted in connecting with the BCFFPA or other community support services.

Rights of foster parents

To help ensure that children in care receive the best possible care, foster parents are entitled to:

- be treated with consideration, trust, honesty, respect, acceptance and fairness by the director
- receive pertinent information for the care of the child, including, but not limited to, medical, education, personal care information, significant family personal history as well as care, guardianship, custody and access arrangements
- receive a clear understanding of their role as caregivers and the role of the director
- refuse to provide care for a child if they feel they cannot meet the child's needs
- participate in decision-making regarding a child in care and to be treated as a member of the team in developing the child's Plan of Care
- receive support from and be able to consult with the director so as to better meet the needs of children in care
- be notified of any court action or third-party review regarding a child in their care
- be informed of any dispute resolution processes available when they have a disagreement with the director
- be provided with reasons when a child in care is removed from them
- be provided with reasons when a home or resource is to be closed

Foster parents in Family Care Homes are also entitled to:

- be trained in their role as members of a child's care team and be provided with educational opportunities with respect to caring for children
- receive services to support and stabilize the placement
- participate in foster parent training and local Foster Parent Associations
- access information about themselves kept in the director's records
- appeal a termination or suspension of their agreement

- be provided with access to support services when placements are terminated to minimize the caregivers' feelings of disruption or grief
- be considered as a permanent family for a child, along with all other suitable homes, if the director determines that a permanent plan is in the child's best interests

In working with foster parents, the director has the responsibility, as provided for in the caregivers' agreements, to:

- provide support, assistance and advice as may be needed, at a level consistent with available staff time and resources
- ensure through consultation that the needs of a child placed do not exceed the abilities and resources of the caregivers
- assist the foster parent, if requested, in accessing all available community services if a member of the foster family is physically or emotionally injured because of an assault by a child in care or a member of the child's family

Insurance, Workers' Compensation and income tax

Your insurance needs as a foster home are a little different from those of most families. The three main areas of difference are in third-party liability coverage for your home, coverage for theft and damage caused by a child placed in your home, and automobile third-party liability coverage. The ministry strongly recommends that you consult with your insurance agent about coverage requirements.

Household and tenant insurance

All Family Care Homes must have household insurance; it is a requirement of their agreement with the ministry. The ministry funds the BCFFPA to provide two types of home insurance coverage for foster families:

- One policy automatically provides all foster parents with third-party liability insurance related to carrying out their foster care responsibilities. (Third-party liability insurance covers you if someone else makes a claim against you for unintentional bodily injury or property damage.) This insurance provides coverage regardless of what your own home insurance provides.
- The other policy is a rider to your own home insurance, arranged by the BCFFPA especially for foster homes in the program. It extends your coverage to include theft of or damage to your property caused by a child in care. If such damage or theft occurs, the deductible on the policy may be reimbursed by the ministry.

If you don't already have household insurance, you should discuss this with your resource social worker. For details on the two types of insurance coverage offered by the BCFFPA for all approved foster parents, contact your local BCFFPA association or the federation's principal office.

Automobile insurance

Make sure that you have adequate and appropriate vehicle insurance. Consult with your insurance agent about your vehicle insurance needs, in particular as they relate to third-party liability and to your insurance group classification.

You must have at least $1 million automobile third-party liability insurance coverage on any vehicle used to transport a foster child. Of course, it is always important to ensure that the vehicle is mechanically sound, and is operated in a safe manner by a properly licensed driver.

Workers' Compensation and income replacement

Since foster parents are not employees of the provincial government, they are not covered as employees by the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB). In some circumstances, however, they may be considered employers (for example, if they employ and pay for their own support staff). The WCB recommends that you call them to discuss how the agency might help or affect you as a foster parent.

The WCB also offers income-replacement insurance, called Personal Optional Protection insurance, which may be of interest to foster parents. If you wish to obtain this coverage, you should discuss your needs with the WCB.

To be sure that you are complying with their policies, the WCB recommends that you register with them by telephone (for phone numbers, see the blue pages of the phone book).

Other income-replacement plans are available through private insurance companies. The BCFFPA has useful information on this topic.

Personal income tax

In general, money you receive from the ministry that is used for the care of the child placed in your foster home is not taxable. However, the rules can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and you should consult with the BCFFPA and Revenue Canada for the most recent information on this topic.

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The Child, Family and Community Service Act

The Child, Family and Community Service Act (*CF&CS Act*) is the province's legislation for child protection and for many of the support services used by families. It became law on January 29, 1996. Everything we do for children and youth in care (and therefore everything done in the Family Care Home program) is authorized by and must be consistent with this act.

The sections discussed here are particularly important for foster parents. (If you wish to read the entire act, you can purchase a copy from Crown Publications or ask your local library where it is available for reference. If you want to know how the ministry interprets the act in its day-to-day operations, consult the ministry's Child, Family and Community Service policy manuals. These should also be available for reference through your local library.)

Guiding principles (section 1)	
What the act says	***What this means for foster parents***
• Children are entitled to be protected from abuse, neglect and harm or threat of harm. • A family is the preferred environment for the care and upbringing of children, and the responsibility for the protection of children rests primarily with the parents. • If, with available support services, a family can provide a safe and nurturing environment for a child, support services should be provided.	The first three principles concern society's basic values regarding children and families: that all children have the right to be safe and protected from harm; that parents have the right and obligation to care for their children; and that it is important to support families that need help in providing a safe and nurturing environment for their children.
• The child's views should be taken into account when decisions relating to the child are made.	Children and youths have their own views and ideas, which must be heard and seriously considered when decisions are made.
• Kinship ties and a child's attachment to the extended family should be preserved if possible.	It is important to try to preserve children's connections not only with their natural parents but with their extended family or kin.
• The cultural identity of aboriginal children should be preserved.	It is important to maintain aboriginal children's cultural identity and connections to their aboriginal communities.
• Decisions relating to children should be made and implemented in a timely manner.	Children need to have decisions affecting them made as quickly as possible.

Service delivery principles

Section 3 defines the manner in which all services offered through the act are to be delivered. These principles govern the work of ministry staff, including social workers, but also apply to foster parents. Basically, these principles stress that:

- the child, the natural family and—in the case of aboriginal children—the community all have continuing roles in decisions about the child's care
- any service provided must respect the cultural, racial and religious background of the child
- communities should, when appropriate, be involved in caring for children

Service delivery principles (section 3)

The following principles apply to the provision of services under this act:

(a) families and children should be informed of the services available to them and encouraged to participate in decisions that affect them;

(b) aboriginal people should be involved in the planning and delivery of services to aboriginal families and their children;

(c) services should be planned and provided in ways that are sensitive to the needs and the cultural, racial and religious heritage of those receiving the services;

(d) services should be integrated, wherever possible and appropriate, with services provided by other ministries and community agencies

(e) the community should be involved, wherever possible and appropriate, in the planning and delivery of services, including preventive and support services to families and children.

Best interests of the child

Since a child's best interests can mean different things to different people, this section explains the term in detail. It lists seven factors that must be considered when a child's best interests are being determined.

In the case of aboriginal children, the act underlines the relation of their aboriginal heritage to their best interests. In practical terms, this means finding ways to maintain children's connection to their aboriginal communities when they come into care, including a preference for placements with extended family, if this reinforces the other factors that make up their best interests. (See also the following section.)

Best interests of the child (section 4)

(1) Where there is a reference in this act to the best interests of a child, all relevant factors must be considered in determining the child's best interests, including for example:

- (a) the child's safety;
- (b) the child's physical and emotional needs and level of development;
- (c) the importance of continuity in the child's care;
- (d) the quality of the relationship the child has with a parent or other person and the effect of maintaining that relationship;
- (e) the child's cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage;
- (f) the child's views;
- (g) the effect on the child if there is delay in making a decision.

(2) If the child is an aboriginal child, the importance of preserving the child's cultural identity must be considered in determining the child's best interests.

Out-of-home living arrangements

Note that in this section, the act's guiding principles and best interests provisions are echoed and applied directly to placement decisions.

Out-of-home living arrangements (section 71)

(1) When deciding where to place a child, a director must consider the child's best interests.

(2) The director must give priority to placing the child with a relative or, if that is not consistent with the child's best interests, placing the child as follows:

- (a) in a location where the child can maintain contact with relatives and friends;
- (b) in the same family unit as the child's brothers and sisters;
- (c) in a location that will allow the child to continue in the same school.

(3) If the child is an aboriginal child, the director must give priority to placing the child as follows:

- (a) with the child's extended family or within the child's aboriginal cultural community;
- (b) with another aboriginal family, if the child cannot be safely placed under paragraph (a);
- (c) in accordance with subsection (2), if the child cannot be safely placed under paragraph (a) or (b) of this subsection.

Confidentiality and disclosure of information

Neither foster parents nor social workers may disclose information obtained through their work except in circumstances outlined in the act. Two situations where it is acceptable to disclose information, with or without the consent of the child or family, are when the disclosure is:

- necessary to ensure the safety or well-being of the child
- made to foster parents, and the information relates to a child in their care

Confidentiality, privacy of information, and the keeping and safeguarding of records are all very important matters. Both the *CF&CS Act* and the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* have increased our focus on these matters. Our understanding of these issues has changed over the past five years and will continue to evolve. If you are ever in doubt about what to do, talk to your resource worker or the child's social worker.

Guardianship Status and Implications for Foster Parents

I. Through agreement between the director and the parent

Formal arrangement	*Overall goal*	*Guardianship status*	*Implications for foster parent*
Voluntary Care agreement	Return home	Child's parent or guardian	Parents have access to the child and generally retain decision-making rights over various aspects of the child's life, such as education, religion, and medical care (except emergency).
Special Needs agreement	Return home or independence	Child's parent or guardian	Parents have access to the child and generally retain decision-making rights over various aspects of the child's life, such as education, religion, and medical care (except emergency).

II. Through court action undertaken by the director

Formal arrangement	*Overall goal*	*Guardianship status*	*Implications for foster parent*
Supervision order	Monitoring child's safety and well-being	Child's parent or guardian	Not in foster care. Resides with parent. This order can be made at the end of a child's time in foster care.
Interim custody order	Return home	Child's parent or guardian (director has care of the child)	Parents may have access, and retain right to all but emergency guardianship decisions.
Temporary custody order	Return home	Director (except right to consent to adoption)	Parents may have access, and should be consulted on most decisions.
Continuing custody order	Adoption (if under age 12), placement with extended family or aboriginal community, continuing foster care, independence	Director	Director is sole guardian. Parents may apply for access.
Family Relations Act, section 29 (Legal guardian dies without will)	Temporary care until more appropriate Plan of Care is established	Director	Director is sole guardian. Preferred plan is placement with extended family.
Adoption Act	Adoption	Director	Temporary care while adoptive home is found.

Rights of children in care

Section 70 is one of the most important parts of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* for foster parents. The rights of children in care are not just guidelines; their inclusion in the act makes them the law. They are also written into each Family Care Home agreement, which foster parents sign before a child is placed with them. Foster parents must act in accordance with these rights and also make sure that children in their care are aware of them.

The rights of children in care are protected through the Children's Commission. Any child in care or any other person, including foster parents, can make a complaint to the Commission about a violation of a right under section 70. Complaints can be made without fear of consequence or retribution.

The Children's Commission monitors government's child- and family-serving system. This includes services provided by foster parents. The commission:

- ensures that children and their caregivers are heard if they complain about services
- reviews complaints affecting children, if the complainants have gone through the ministry's internal process and are not satisfied
- works with the ministry to ensure the needs and interests of children in care are met through effective case planning
- reviews all children's deaths and makes recommendations to improve service and prevent further deaths
- reviews critical injuries of children known to or in the care of the ministry
- informs British Columbians about the state of the child- and family-serving system

Note that in this section, the act's guiding principles and best interests provisions are echoed and applied directly to placement decisions.

Rights of children in care (section 70)	
What the act says	***What this means for foster parents***
• To be fed, clothed and nurtured according to community standards and to be given the same quality of care as other children in the placement.	Children in care are entitled to the same care (food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care, nurturing and so forth) that members of the community would find acceptable for their own children. All children in care living in the same home must receive similar treatment, so long as it fits with their Plan of Care. It is important to remember that quality of care must not depend on behaviour or be subject to favouritism.
• To be informed about their Plans of Care. • To be consulted and to express their views, according to their abilities, about significant decisions affecting them.	Foster parents help children to understand what is in their Plans of Care, encourage them to express their views about these plans, and ask their opinions whenever important decisions are taken. Foster parents and the children's social workers must tell children what will happen to them while they are in care, and must listen to the children's views on the matter.
• To reasonable privacy and to possession of their personal belongings. • To privacy during discussions with members of their families, subject to subsection (2).	Children in care are entitled to privacy, and to keep their personal belongings. The act uses the word "reasonable," recognizing that there might be occasions when limiting these rights is appropriate. For instance, the child's right to speak privately with members of their family may be limited by a court order. Or these rights may not apply under circumstances of threat to the safety or well-being of the child or other person. For example, a child may hoard food in their room to the point that it becomes a health hazard. Any such limitation, however, must be made in a way that still respects the child. This means that such decisions should usually be made openly, with the child given the opportunity to express an opinion on the matter.
• To be free from corporal punishment.	Foster parents must not subject children in their care to any use of physical force, such as spanking, hitting or slapping, that may inflict pain. **This is an absolute right, with no exceptions.**
• To be informed of the standard of behaviour expected by their caregivers and of the consequences of not meeting their caregivers' expectations.	Children must know what behaviour is expected of them, what the rules of the house are, and what will happen if they break these rules.

Rights of children in care (cont'd)	
What the act says	***What this means for foster parents***
	The foster parent's role in carrying out the rights listed at left is described in each child's Plan of Care (which is created with input from the foster parent).
• To receive medical and dental care when required.	Be alert for emotional as well as physical signs that a child may need help. It could be that they're excessively sad or depressed, or having an unusually hard time adapting to being in care.
• To participate in social and recreational activities if available and appropriate and according to their abilities and interests.	It's important for children to have friends and to be involved in activities. Speak to the child's social worker if you need help finding out what's offered in your community.
• To receive the religious instruction and to participate in the religious activities of their choice. • To receive guidance and encouragement to maintain their cultural heritage.	Remember that the child may not be comfortable with any religion. That's their choice, too. If you don't have the background or knowledge to help the child preserve their cultural ties, ask their social worker to help you locate others who can.
• To be provided with an interpreter if language or disability is a barrier to consulting with them on decisions affecting their custody or care.	The degree of consultation in all cases will depend on the child's development and ability to understand. If children have problems understanding the language used in the home, or have disabilities that are barriers to speaking or understanding, they have a right to assistance (through interpreters or augmentative communication aids) to help them communicate about important matters. The child's social worker can help you obtain interpretive services.
• To privacy during discussions with a lawyer, the Child, Youth and Family Advocate, the Ombudsman, a member of the Legislative Assembly or a member of Parliament. • To be informed about and to be assisted in contacting the Child, Youth and Family Advocate. • To be informed of their rights under this act and the procedures available for enforcing their rights.	Foster parents and the children's social workers must tell children what their rights are. This includes being informed about what the Child, Youth and Family Advocate can do for them and how to contact the Advocate if they wish to. The foster parent or child's social worker can also contact the Advocate on behalf of the child.
• A child who is removed under Part 3 is entitled to exercise the right in subsection (1)(l), subject to any court order made after the court has had an opportunity to consider the question of access to the child.	The foster parent ensures that a child who has been removed from their home because of a protection concern has privacy when meeting with members of their family unless the court orders otherwise. Consult with the child's social worker for clarification.
This section does not apply to a child who is in a place of confinement.	The rights of children in care are not enforceable when the child is detained in a mental health or correctional facility.

Rights of Foster Parents

Rights of foster parents

To help ensure that children in care receive the best possible care, foster parents are entitled to:

- be treated with consideration, trust, honesty, respect, acceptance and fairness by the director
- receive pertinent information for the care of the child, including, but not limited to, medical, education, personal care information, significant family personal history as well as care, guardianship, custody and access arrangements
- receive a clear understanding of their role as caregivers and the role of the director
- refuse to provide care for a child if they feel they cannot meet the child's needs
- participate in decision-making regarding a child in care and to be treated as a member of the team in developing the child's Plan of Care
- receive support from and be able to consult with the director so as to better meet the needs of children in care
- be notified of any court action or third-party review regarding a child in their care
- be informed of any dispute resolution processes available when they have a disagreement with the director
- be provided with reasons when a child in care is removed from them
- be provided with reasons when a home or resource is to be closed

Foster parents in Family Care Homes are also entitled to:

- be trained in their role as members of a child's care team and be provided with educational opportunities with respect to caring for children
- receive services to support and stabilize the placement
- participate in foster parent training and local Foster Parent Associations
- access information about themselves kept in the director's records
- appeal a termination or suspension of their agreement
- be provided with access to support services when placements are terminated to minimize the caregivers' feelings of disruption or grief
- be considered as a permanent family for a child, along with all other suitable homes, if the director determines that a permanent plan is in the child's best interests

Foster Parents' Pre-placement Checklist

Foster parents often wish they had asked more questions before accepting a child into their home. This checklist should help you in your discussion with the ministry. Some questions might not apply to particular or emergency placements.

1. Why is the child being placed?
2. What are previous placement experiences of the child?
3. What is the child's legal status?
4. What is the family situation? Parents' names?
5. What is the plan for the child? Expected length of placement?
6. Will there be pre-placement visits by the child?
7. Does the child understand why he or she has moved or been separated from the parents?
8. Where are the parents?
9. Will the parents or extended family visit? Where? How often? Are there people who are not permitted to visit or have contact with the child?
10. Are there brothers or sisters? Where are they? Birthdates?
11. When will the social worker visit or call?
12. When will I receive the referral form from the social worker, giving important personal information about the child?
13. When will I receive the child's Health Care Passport?
14. When was the last physical examination?
15. Is the child in good health? What about allergies, immunizations, medications, dental care, last dental checkup?
16. Are there significant religious, cultural or ethnic considerations for this child?
17. What grade is the child in at school? What school?
18. Are there school problems?
19. Has the child any special behavioural problems or unusual habits?
20. Could any of their behaviours pose a risk to other children?
21. Will the child have adequate clothing?
22. What will make the child feel most at home (food likes and dislikes, favourite toys, and so on?)
23. Who should I call after hours, and what is the number?
24. When will I meet with the social worker to review the caregiver's responsibilities section of the child's Plan of Care?
25. What transportation needs to be provided for this child?

Glossary

The following definitions of terms used in this handbook are taken from the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* and from the ministry's *Policy Manual, vol. 2A*. Check the Index to see how terms are used in context.

Aboriginal child

A child:
(a) who is registered under the Indian Act (Canada),
(b) who has a biological parent who is registered under the *Indian Act (Canada)*,
(c) who is under 12 years of age and has a biological parent who
  (i) is of aboriginal ancestry, and
  (ii) considers himself or herself to be aboriginal, or
(d) who is 12 years of age or over, of aboriginal ancestry and considers himself or herself to be aboriginal.

Best interests of the child

Refers to factors listed in section 4 of the *CF&CS Act*.

Care

Physical care and control of a child by a director or other person.

Caregiver

A person with whom a child is placed by a director and who, by agreement with the director, has assumed responsibility for the child's day-to-day care.

Child

A person under 19 years of age; includes a youth.

Child in care

A child who is in the custody, care or guardianship of a director.

Continuing custody order

An order under section 41(1)(d), 42(3)(b), 49(4) or (5) or 60 of the *CF&CS Act*, placing a child in the continuing custody of a director.

Custody

Includes care and guardianship of a child.

Director

A person designated by the minister under section 91 of the *CF&CS Act* and includes for the purposes of sections 84 to 86 the director of adoption.

Homemaker services

Includes services performed in the home by family members, relatives or friends, home support workers, or homemakers on contract to a director.

Kin	Includes people related by blood, marriage or long-standing family-like relationships.
Plan of Care	A written document arrived at through agreement with persons involved in the care of a child, which sets out the ways in which the needs of a child in care will be met.
Support Services agreement	A written agreement made under section 5 of the *CF&CS Act*, under which a director may agree with a parent to provide services to support and assist a family to care for a child.
Temporary custody order	A court order made under section 41(1)(b) or (c), 42(3)(a) or 60 of the *CF&CS Act*, placing a child for a specified period of time in the custody of a director or another person, and includes any extension of or change to that order.
Youth	A person who is 16 years of age or over but under 19 years of age.

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Quick Reference

Emergencies

Ministry for Children and Families After Hours Line (see page 43)
For emergencies outside office hours (usually 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday), foster parents can call the ministry's After Hours Line:

- In Vancouver, the North Shore and Richmond, call **660-4927**
- In the Lower Mainland from Burnaby and Delta in the west to Maple Ridge and Langley in the east, call **660-8180**
- For the rest of the province, call toll free at **1-800-663-9122**

Poison Control Centre
1-800-567-8911 from anywhere in B.C.

Helpline for Children (to report child abuse or neglect)
Dial **310-1234** from anywhere in B.C. 24 hours a day (no area code required).

Local fire department _____

Local police _____

Local hospital emergency room _____

Local crisis information line _____
(for people in emotional crisis)

Other useful resources

B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations (BCFFPA)
(604) 660-7696 or toll free at **1-800-663-9999**

Foster Families Support Line (see page 39)
1-888-495-4440 4:00 p.m. – 12:45 a.m., Monday to Friday
8:00 a.m. - 12:45 a.m., statutory holidays and weekends

Child, Youth and Family Advocate
1-800-476-3933 from anywhere in B.C. or **775-3203** in the Vancouver calling area

Children's Commission
1-800-859-1441 from anywhere in B.C. or **356-8963** in the Victoria calling area

Ombudsman
1-800-567-3247 from anywhere in B.C. or **387-5855** in the Victoria calling area

Public Trustee
(604) 660-4444

Additional numbers you may wish to fill in yourself:

Child's social worker — Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Resource social worker — Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Ministry district office _____

Doctor — Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Local foster association _____

Mental health centre _____

Public health centre _____

Probation officer — Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Other important numbers:

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____